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Employed Mothers: Expectations, Aspirations, and Self-Perceptions

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the
Prerequisite for Honors
in Sociology

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INTRODUCTION

“All the Lean In stuff makes me want to throw up!” - Professor Susan Reverby

The debate over whether women can “have it all,” meaning a satisfying career and family life, captured my attention when *The Atlantic* published Anne Marie Slaughter’s piece, “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All,” in June of 2012. The publication of Sheryl Sandberg’s book, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, less than a year later in March 2013 brought even more attention to the debate. Slaughter and Sandberg both make the argument that employed women are disadvantaged and primarily blame this on the structure of the workplace and the difficulty of managing their work and family responsibilities. Slaughter suggests that high-powered women are the ones who are responsible for changing the work environment to suit the needs of all women. Sandberg argues that women need to work harder and emulate their male colleagues in order to have satisfying careers. Both of these women continue to make headlines and travel the country as spokespeople for employed women despite substantial criticism from feminist scholars and activists.

Slaughter’s piece and Sandberg’s book, address a limited and specific group of women. These women, like Slaughter and Sandberg, have high levels of education, high paying jobs in competitive fields, and many resources at their disposal to help them manage their family lives. The majority of women in the United States do not have all of these advantages and are often burdened by the lack of them in addition to male domination. In reference to women of color Collins writes, “While male domination certainly has been an important theme for racial ethnic women in the United States, gender inequality has worked in tandem with racial domination and economic exploitation” (1994:46). Excluding women who belong to a lower socioeconomic

group and/or racial minority and those with lower levels of education and jobs outside the corporate world while focusing solely on male domination as a structural component of the workplace creates a false image of employed motherhood.

Slaughter and Sandberg also fail to acknowledge that all of the duties mothers perform in the home are work, which further contributes to their limited conception of employed motherhood. All mothers work. Cooking is work; cleaning is work; childcare is work, as is shopping, organizing after-school activities, making doctor's appointments, and managing the finances. Mothers do all of these things and more. Sandberg and Slaughter are fortunate enough to be in financial positions that allow them to hire others, most likely women, to do this work for them if they so choose. The use of the term "working mothers" in reference to women who work for pay perpetuates the devaluation of all the work that mothers do for their families that is not paid. In order to combat these messages, I use the term "employed mothers" to refer to women with children who work for pay.

The commonly accepted definition of work in the United States refers to labor that is done outside of the home for which one is paid. This does not include the work that mothers do for their families inside of the home without pay. The public space is where work is done, while the private space is where chores and caretaking are done. Traditionally, the public and private spheres are inhabited primarily by men and women, respectively. Patricia Hill Collins writes, "reserving the public sphere for men as a "male" domain leaves the private domestic sphere as a "female" domain. Gender roles become tied to the dichotomous constructions of these two basic societal institutions—men work and women take care of families" (1994:46). When roles within the two spheres are assigned by gender, but women must contribute financially to the family, women take on what Hochschild terms a "second shift." Like Collins, Hochschild also notes the

influence of gender roles in disadvantaging women who are employed. She writes, “One reason that half the lawyers, doctors, businesspeople are not women is because *men do not share in the raising of their children and the caring of their homes* [...] Women who do a first shift at work and all of a second shift at home can’t compete on male terms” (2012:preface). Over time, men have taken on more of this “second shift,” but women continue to take on more than their share of the household responsibilities than men.

A 2013 study conducted by the Pew Research Center found that on average mothers spend 31 hours per week doing unpaid work and fathers spend an average of 17 hours per week doing unpaid work (Wang 2013:2). When women are engaging in more unpaid work than men they have less time to devote to paid work, which invariably puts them in a less financially secure position than men. The ability to be financially independent is critical for women in our capitalist society to pursue their educational, career, and family goals. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development reports similar results in their 2012 study, “On average, women put in 21 minutes a day more at work and at home than men do [...] American men put in about 5 hours a day on the job; women put in four. But women make up the difference and then some at home, putting in a little over 4 hours on housework and childcare, compared to only 2.7 hours for men” (Futrelle 2012). This so-called “chore gap” becomes increasingly troubling as more and more women enter the workforce and are unable to reach their full potential, in part, because of the extra hours they put in at home.

The other part of the issue for employed mothers is that they are subject to discriminatory practices in the workplace. The percentage of women in the workforce has risen considerably since the 1970s; therefore, the number of women impacted by these practices has risen as well. Today, 57.7% of women in the United States are employed, compared to 38% in 1970 (US

Department of Labor 2012). 70.5% of mothers with children under the age of 18 are employed, and interestingly, an even higher percentage of mothers with children between 6-17 years are employed, 75.1% (US Department of Labor 2012). Gender inequality and discrimination in the workplace continues to be an issue and research on “daddy bonuses” and “mommy penalties” verify that employers also treat parents differently than non-parent employees in gendered ways (US Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013). Women overall make between \$.75-\$.78 for every dollar a man makes, with even worse ratios for minority women (US Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development released a report on the wage gap and found that in the United States, full-time-employed women without children earn 7% less than men, while full-time-employed women with children make 23% less than men (Rampell 2012). Pay equity is a critical issue, but only one example of the discriminatory treatment working women and mothers face.

Women in the workforce also experience vertical and horizontal segregation. Vertical segregation refers to the “overrepresentation of men and under representation of women in senior management positions within a specific sector or industry” (catalyst.org 2013). Horizontal segregation refers to the “over employment of women and men in different occupations or fields” (catalyst.org 2013). Vertical and horizontal segregation are significantly influenced by gender expectations and assumptions that assign supposedly innate characteristics and skills to men and women.

As the daughter of a woman who has always managed to work full-time in a male dominated field, cook dinner every night, and support her three children in their countless endeavors, I had long been under the impression that women can do anything they set their minds to. Recent media coverage and my fascination with understanding why what my mother

does is actually so challenging and, in some cases, impossible for employed mothers led me to my thesis topic. In all of the research on the situation employed women are in, the authors do not pay enough attention to what women want for themselves in their careers and for their families in their home life. Researchers place greater emphasis on the treatment of women in the workforce, rather than allowing women to share their interpretations of their workplace experiences of gender and motherhood.

The aim of my thesis is to develop a more robust understanding of the self-perceptions employed mothers from a variety of education and career backgrounds as they navigate a gendered world. My study places emphasis on what women want for themselves and their families and the expectations they have as employed mothers. My research question is the following: How do employed mothers experience gendered work environments and how do these experiences impact their professional and personal fulfillment? The data used to answer this question consists of fourteen interviews conducted with women from a variety of career and education backgrounds.

Chapter One involves a review of existing literature on the gendering of the workplace and reveals that women's perspectives remain marginal in research on gender and work. Chapter Two includes an explanation of my research design and methodology. Chapter Three analyzes what women find fulfilling in their careers and personal lives and finds that employed mothers largely reject the idea that women want to "have it all." An alternative understanding of what it means for women to "have it all" is proposed. Chapter Four focuses on gender discrimination in the workplace and makes the argument that women know when they are being treated differently because of their gender. It is important to acknowledge that women know they face discrimination and to understand the types of discrimination they recognize in order to better

understand the limits of existing data on reporting that influences policy making. Chapter Five discusses the ways in which women strategically perform their gender and examines the possible responses they intend to produce as a result of these performances. The final chapter consists of concluding thoughts, implications of this study, and suggestions for future research projects.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

Introduction

While existing research examines the gendering of the work environment, its reproduction, and its impact on women given gender role expectations and career ambitions in the United States, there remains a need for a more robust understanding of how women perceive themselves as workers and mothers within gendered work environments that operate in the context of a gendered world. Researchers tend to presume what women want, or what women in a narrowly defined group might want. This framing leaves out any recognition of women's agency to make strategic decisions about their gender performance for the benefit of their careers.

Early research posited and revealed the gendered character of the workplace. Researchers argued that the organizational structure of work environments allows for and perpetuates the gendering of the workplace (Acker 1990, Britton 2000, Smithson and Stokoe 2005). While this contribution is valuable to begin a conversation on the gendered workplace, it does not address the ways in which individuals and groups of people perpetrate these socially constructed structures in the workplace. Another group of studies addresses this shortcoming and suggests that gendered work environments are reproduced through the actions, behavior, expectations, and attitudes of employed men and women in workplace environments (Martin 2001 & 2003, Maume 1999, Stone 2007, West and Zimmerman 1987). These researchers do not grant women agency, however, and therefore imply that employed women are passive or lack the ability to control their own behavior. Most recently, research concerning the possibility of women being able to manage both a career and a family recognizes the control women have over their own lives, while also acknowledging that structural inequalities both in the home and the workplace

limit their success. This research takes into account gender expectations (Corrigall and Conrad 2007, Hoffnung and Williams 2012), societal expectations for mothers (Zimmerman et al. 2008), and the motherhood penalty (Lips and Lawson 2009). The literature on the gendering of the workplace has improved over time in that researchers are increasingly addressing employed women's own awareness of their position in the workplace, but women's personal experiences need to become the focus.

I. The workplace is gendered by design

Much of the literature on the gendered organizational structures of the workplace leaves out women's own narratives of their experiences, thereby suggesting that women are either ignorant of their gendered work environments or incapable of challenging them. Joan Acker's work on the gendering of the workplace opened the door for numerous other studies on employed women. Today there is ample quantitative and qualitative evidence that the workplace is gendered as she theorized. Her seminal 1990 piece titled "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations," has been cited by the majority of the other articles mentioned in this literature review. She explains, "to say that an organization, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine" (Acker 1990:146).

Five processes work in connection with each other to produce a gendered environment. These five processes are the construction of a binary between men and women in terms of behavior, power, place, etc. that privileges men over women, the construction of images and symbols which reinforce and perpetuate the binary, interactions between people in all possible gender combinations, the influence of gender on individual identity, and genders influence on organizational logic (Acker 1990:146-147). These processes leave out the possibility for

awareness on the part of male and female employees that the workplace is gendered because it does not account for individual agency and conscious decision-making. My interviews provide evidence, which will be discussed in Chapter Five, that women are well aware of their position within a gendered work environment and sometimes make efforts to subvert the workplace gender hierarchy.

Dana Britton's piece, "The Epistemology of the Gendered Organization," aims to refine Acker's process of identifying gendered organizations, but ultimately falls short because little attention is paid to women's own narratives. She agrees that the workplace is gendered by design, but suggests that Acker thinks the workplace is *inherently* gendered (Britton 2000:421). Britton argues that Acker's view is problematic because "simply assuming, a priori, that organizations are gendered drastically limits the potential of this approach to produce social change" (Britton 2000:422). The possibility that women are actively discriminated against and that there are individuals who need to be held responsible for this discrimination is not considered by Acker. Acker writes, "Gender processes, including the manipulation and management of women's and men's sexuality, procreation, and emotion, are part of the control processes of organizations, maintaining not only gender stratification but contributing also to maintaining class and, possibly, race and ethnic relations" (1990:154). Britton critiques Acker for failing to suggest that the gendering of the workplace that places women in a subordinate position in relation to men is done consciously (2000). She goes on to criticize Acker for only positing that the gendered workplace is a product of organizational structure (2000). While Britton succeeds in improving upon Acker's claims, she herself fails to take women's own voices into account and thereby implies that women have no concept of their marginalized position in the workplace. The exclusion of women's personal experiences from this research

makes it impossible to truly understand the magnitude of the issue and to design effective solutions.

Acker addresses the issue most relevant to my topic, that women are treated differently in part because of their potential to be mothers, but she does not acknowledge that women's reproductive capabilities do require more of them physically. She asserts that the concept of a universal worker excludes women because the ideal worker is a man (Acker 1990:150). Women are devalued as workers because of their relationship with childbearing (Acker 1990:152). "Women's bodies – female sexuality, their ability to procreate and their pregnancy, breast-feeding, and child care, menstruation, and mythic "emotionality" – are suspect, stigmatized, and used as grounds for control and exclusion" (Acker 1990:152). The structure of the workplace does not allow for women to easily complete all of their responsibilities as workers and as mothers, although it is suggested here that there are significant misunderstandings about women's bodies. Acker seems to suggest that women should not be treated differently than men because of their physical characteristics. However, it is important to note that women's bodies do produce more responsibilities for women. This does not mean that they should be treated poorly, but as Smithson and Stokoe suggest, they might benefit from being treated differently than men are currently treated.

Smithson and Stokoe offer the perspective that women should not try to emulate men in the workplace and hide their gender differences because the workplace is not designed for women. They summarize their argument in writing, "Our analysis suggests that masking or minimizing gender differences within gender-neutral language does not, as a strategy, appear to be working as a means for advancing gender equality" (2005:164). The workplace is structured to favor traditional gender roles that allow employees to work long, inflexible hours because

their partner is at home taking care of all the domestic responsibilities. Workplace structure cannot serve women if it does not also serve men. Smithson and Stokoe suggest a move away from gender binaries when considering alternative workplace organization and structure (2005:164). They present the argument that a real effort needs to be made to reframe these issues as societal and organizational rather than issues only related to women, which would hopefully lead to the normalization of flexible workplace policies for both men and women to take advantage of (Smithson and Stokoe 2005:164-165). A lot of progress needs to be made, however, for the gender binary to successfully not be a factor in workplace organization. To their credit, Smithson and Stokoe do include women's voices in their study, which potentially make their findings more reliable than those of Acker and Britton.

II. Women and men contribute to the reproduction of the gendered workplace

Literature on the reproduction of the gendered workplace does not recognize that gender performance can be conscious, deliberate, and strategic. This implies that women and men are unknowing participants in the reproduction of the gendered workplace, which further suggests that individuals are blameless. Patricia Yancey Martin is in agreement with scholars in the previous section that the organization of the workplace is gendered. Unlike many of the other researchers studying gender in the workplace, Martin's 2003 article titled "'Said and Done' Versus 'Saying and Doing': Gendering Practices, Practicing Gender at Work" utilizes interviews with women and integrates them into her article. She places emphasis on the ways in which workers themselves, both male and female, contribute to the reproduction of the gendered workplace. She writes, "I view gender as having a social structure and related practices with a history that entails opportunities and constraints and a plethora of meanings, expectations, actions/behaviors, resources, identities, and discourses that are fluid and shifting yet robust and

persisting” (Martin 2003:344). The actions and behaviors associated with gender contribute greatly to the gendering of the workplace (Martin 2003:344). Conceptions of masculinity and femininity are at the core of actions and behaviors, which reproduce gendered work environments. Martin explains that this is tacit knowledge, meaning knowledge that is gained through practice (2003:351).

In an earlier article Martin discusses how men “mobilize masculinities” in the workplace by acting in ways that women do not identify with because they have been socialized differently (2001:588-589). This kind of behavior may not be intentional, but works to make women feel that they do not belong in the workplace or do not belong in certain positions or departments that are dominated by men. Martin’s claims are very similar to those made by West and Zimmerman in their 1987 article titled “Doing Gender.” West and Zimmerman state that “doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perpetual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine “natures”” (1987:126). What is missing from Martin’s analysis is acknowledgement that women mobilize femininities in the workplace. West and Zimmerman’s analysis of gender performance asserts that both men and women mobilize masculinity and femininity, respectively. My interviewees suggest, however, that not only do women mobilize femininities they also mobilize masculinities. They do so because they recognize the power they possess over the perceptions their colleagues have of them and use this knowledge to their advantage.

David Maume offers evidence that individuals possess ideas about what jobs are appropriate for men and which are appropriate for women based on their ascribed gender characteristics (1999:488). “For example, having a spouse or young children may signal stability in men but a potential work disruption in women” (Maume 1999:490). It can be assumed by

employers who understand established constructions of gender and gender expectations that male employees with families will be motivated to provide for their families, while female employees with families are assumed to prioritize their family life over their work life.

Existing research suggests that gender dynamics in the workplace benefit men and harm women. Maume explores this possibility in his research on promotions to management positions and reports that white men in female dominated workplaces have an advantage over their white female colleagues (1999:501). Even in female dominated workplaces white men are more likely to be promoted than white women (Maume 1999:501). The gender composition of the workplace combined with understandings of gender roles and expectations impact men and women differently and ultimately support the gendered nature of the work environment. Maume's work focuses on measureable gains, such as promotions, but by doing so he assumes that all employees desire promotions. This assumption leaves out the possibility that women have other career goals besides gaining a higher title.

Pamela Stone takes Maume's argument in a different direction and suggests that gender dynamics in the workplace contribute to women's decisions to leave the workforce (2007). Women sacrifice more of their careers for their children than men do (Stone 2007). When they take time off and need to put their family ahead of their work, no matter how minimal it might be, women experience setbacks and greater inequality in salaries and promotions (Stone 2007). Gender expectations and roles contribute to the situation in the workplace and also influence the decision of which parent should stay home, should that be determined to be necessary. Women are more likely to leave their careers to stay at home with children than men (Stone 2007). In choosing to leave the workforce women inadvertently contribute to the reproduction of the gendered work environment. Instead of working to change the structure of

the workplace by negotiating for flexible schedules or introducing plans for telecommuting, for example, the structure is maintained and men continue to dominate. Furthermore, assumptions discussed earlier that employers and managers make when determining hiring and promotions about women eventually leaving or not being as dedicated their male colleagues are confirmed.

III. Women are disadvantaged by the combination of gender role expectations and career ambitions

The contributions to the literature on women and employment that address the challenge women face in combining gender role expectations and career ambitions are much more in line with my own in that this approach places more emphasis on the agency that women do have even in the gendered workforce. Corrigan and Konrad discuss a compelling study on how gender role attitudes shape work hours and earning for men and women. They compare people with traditional views on gender roles and people with more egalitarian views. It has been shown that as women have entered the workforce in greater numbers views on their role have become more egalitarian (Corrigan and Konrad 2007:847). They found that “women with more egalitarian attitudes take actions that differ from those of women with more traditional attitudes. They may seek more post-secondary education, train for jobs with higher pay, put more effort into their jobs, take less time off when children are born, or engage in a combination of behaviors that result in higher earnings” (Corrigan and Konrad 2007:853). There is clear acknowledgement that women make conscious decisions about subverting their traditional gender roles in order to pursue their career goals. The individual values that women hold concerning gender roles can influence their experiences in the workforce because they act in ways that reflect these values.

Hoffnung and Williams conducted a study that resulted in many interesting findings, one of which is that the expectations that women had for their home responsibilities were related to

the expectations they had for their careers. “Women committed to employment are more likely to expect to share parenting responsibilities than those who are not” (Hoffnung and Williams 2012:328). Like Corrigan and Konrad’s research, this study also suggests that the expectations women have influence their career goals and outcomes.

Employed women who are mothers are more seriously impacted by the gender pay gap than employed women without children (US Department of Labor 2012). Lips and Lawson conducted a study that aims to examine the differences between men and women in valuing family and power. Overall, men valued power more and family less than women (Lips and Lawson 2009). This is in line with gender expectations and conceptions of femininity and masculinity. Men and women who valued family had lower anticipated work commitment levels (Lips and Lawson 2009). This connects to the finding that women with lower work commitment predicted lower pay (Lips and Lawson 2009). Women who have children make different decisions than men with children about how their careers should be impacted by their role as parents. These decisions seem to be influenced by gender role expectations.

Zimmerman, Aberle, Krafchick, and Harvey write about “mommy wars” which is the debate over whether women who work or women who stay at home are better mothers (2008). Women are caught between being thought of as bad moms for leaving their kids in daycare (and thus not following traditional gender roles) or wasting their education and potential if they stay home (Zimmerman et al. 2008). Ideas about what makes an ideal mother are socially constructed and are reflective of gender assumptions that women are more nurturing than men (Zimmerman et al. 2008:208). Zimmerman and her colleagues present the argument that not only do employed mothers work a “second shift” at home, but that they also work a “third shift” that involves managing self-doubt over balancing their work and family responsibilities (2008:213). Gender

role expectations for both women and men must become less salient and more equitable in order for the disadvantages employed mothers face to diminish.

Conclusion

The ample collection of literature on women, employment, and the workplace serves as a lens through which we can better understand the experiences women have. It is important to notice what is missing from existing literature and what the implications of these omissions are for employers, policy makers, and employed women themselves. Accounts of women's experiences are often left out of studies, which significantly limits how thorough an analysis can be, although there are exceptions (Hoffnung and Williams 2012, Martin 2003 and 2001, Smithson and Stokoe 2005). When women's voices are included they are typically limited by simplistic survey questions with pre-determined answers or reduced to a statistic (Corrigall and Konrad 2007, Lips and Lawson 2009, Maume 1999, Saad 2013). Additionally, feminist literature on women and work, like that explored in the introduction, is more likely to integrate women's voices into studies and publications. Women are the primary sources for these issues and ignoring or diminishing their voices further perpetuates the systems of oppression that they face.

CHAPTER TWO

Research Design and Methodology

Data Collection

My topic and research goal called for qualitative data collected from employed mothers in the form of interviews. Initially I wanted to do a comparison of working class employed mothers and professional employed mothers because the “have it all” and work/life balance discussions that I have been exposed to rarely if ever seek to include working class women. I wanted to go about this by interviewing employed mothers with college degrees and those without them. This proved more difficult than I had anticipated because I do not know or have many connections to working class women. I did reach out to the union at my college whose members include maintenance and food service employees. Unfortunately, the meeting that I attended, at which I was going to introduce my project and hopefully collect contact information, could not be held because not enough union members showed up. I also ran into the issue of identifying employed mothers without college degrees who did not have what would be considered working class jobs or a working class socioeconomic status. This led me to consider the idea that perhaps my original plan of dividing employed mothers into working class and professional groups based on their level of education just does not match the reality that many of these women live. So it then became my priority to interview employed mothers with a range of educational and career backgrounds. I was successful in doing this and have interviewees with high school diplomas, associate’s degrees, bachelor’s degrees, master’s degrees, and doctoral degrees who work in a variety of fields.

In the end, interviewees were identified through personal connections to family and friends. All interviewees are mothers who work full-time and who have at least one child no older than 19. Ethnicity was not purposefully controlled for, but all participants are white.

Similarly, geographic location was not a consideration, but all participants live and work in New England. The interviewees work in a range of occupations currently and their job histories are even more varied. Marital status was not controlled for and my interviewees are single, married, and divorced, which then required consideration in the analysis.

Interviewees were contacted via phone or email and interviews were conducted between September 2013 and December 2013. Participants agreed to have their conversations with me recorded and were made aware that their names, any other names they mentioned, and places of employment would not be named in this thesis.

In total, 13 interviews were conducted either in person or over the phone and one participant provided written responses to the standard set of interview questions. The interviews were semi-structured to allow participants to bring up topics and thoughts not covered by the questions, but to also provide a standard format and a mode of comparison between the responses. Each interview lasted between 25 minutes and 1 hour.

The interviews began with the following brief explanation of my topic and research goals: I am speaking to mothers working full-time with varied occupations and education backgrounds for my Sociology thesis. My questions cover career progression, satisfaction, and decision-making. I am also interested in how women combine work and home/motherhood responsibilities. These interviews will form the foundation for my research project as it progresses through the school year.

The first question is intentionally broad and provides background information on their education and career. Next, the questions focus on their current job and their opinions of it and the work that they do. Gradually, the topic of gender and motherhood comes into play in the questions. The questions then shifted gears to focus more on home responsibilities in

combination with work responsibilities. Finally, participants were asked about their perceptions of the debate over work/life balance for women and what it would mean for them to have a satisfying balance between home and work life.

Demographic Questions:

- *Education level*
- *Number of children*
- *Children's ages*
- *Marital Status*

Interview Questions:

1. *Tell me about how you got to where you are in your career today including education.*
2. *What does your current job entail? Please cover responsibilities, environment, co-worker relations.*
3. *What do you enjoy about your occupation?*
4. *What do you dislike about your occupation?*
5. *Do you feel satisfied with your career? Why or why not?*
6. *Do you feel that being a woman has been an advantage or a disadvantage in your career? How so?*
7. *Do you feel that being a mother has been an advantage or a disadvantage in your career? How so?*
8. *Did your career path change when you had children? How so?*
9. *What aspects of your job made having kids easier? What aspects made it more difficult?*
10. *What are your responsibilities at home?*
11. *Are you satisfied with the combination or balance of your home and work life?*
12. *Recent media coverage has focused on the debate over whether or women can "have it all." What is your take on this debate? How do you see it applying to you?*
13. *Do you think you "have it all?" What does "having it all" involve for you?*

The participants were asked additional questions or were asked to expand on an interesting thought as they came up on a case-by-case basis. Some interviewees who were aware of the research topic had spent time prior to the interview thinking about possible examples or thoughts to share, which added greatly to the depth of those interviews. As more interviews were conducted, the standard set of questions was tweaked slightly to assist participants in better understanding the question. Many participants were very interested in knowing what others had said and what some of my preliminary findings were.

My sample is limited in several ways. As previously mentioned, all participants know me, a friend, or my family. This could impact the rapport I was able to have with the participants

both positively and negatively. Additionally, because some of the participants know me they may have been more or less comfortable telling me information about other people in their lives who are relevant to the study and who I also know. One interviewee has a close connection to my family and while she was very open, perhaps the most open participant, she needed some extra reassurance that I would not be discussing the information she told me with her family members to whom I am close. Another limitation is that four of my participants work at the same government facility. Although they work in different offices on the large campus, the overall culture of the work environment may be similar. Despite these limitations, the quality of my interviews and the perspectives of my interviewees offer much to the existing literature on the topic of employed mothers.

Coding and Analysis

All interviews were recorded and then professionally transcribed. The transcripts were then coded. The codes were the following: being a woman in the workplace, being a mother in the workplace, career/job fulfillment, home-life fulfillment, personal work/life balance, and potential improvement for employed mothers. This stage of the coding process primarily involved organizing longer quotations into categories while also providing initial insights into the interviewee based on her responses. All quotations that were relevant to the broad codes were included. A brief summary of each interview was also written up that highlighted their unique contributions. This portion of my coding process focused on analyzing each interviewee separately in order to better understand her perspective and experience as an employed mother.

The next stage of the coding process aimed to compare the interviewees more directly and to identify common themes that would form the basis for my claims. I used ATLAS.ti to code the previously coded interviews into more specific codes that could then be easily

compared using this software. I had not previously used ATLAS.ti and had to rely on video tutorials and instruction manuals, therefore not all of the features of the software were utilized, but it was nonetheless very helpful in organizing my data in a way that made analysis easier. I used sixteen codes: advantages to employed motherhood, advantages to employed womanhood, balance satisfaction, sacrifice, disadvantages to employed motherhood, household responsibilities, having it all, career advancement, challenging work, career satisfaction, discrimination against women, feminine traits/behaviors, divorced/single, coworkers, work environment, and masculine traits/behaviors. I then used ATLAS.ti functions to group quotes from the interviews by code, which allowed for more direct comparison and for strong and compelling themes to emerge. Three of these themes were then turned into claims. The first claim is that employed mothers do not want to “have it all” and they instead have individual definitions of what it means to have it all, which are informed by their values and priorities. The second claim that employed mothers know when they are being treated differently in the workplace based on their gender. The third claim is closely connected to the second and is that employed mothers are aware of their gender performance in the workplace and strategically manipulate their performance to serve their own needs. These themes represent my empirical chapters.

Demographic Profiles

| <i>Pseudonym</i> | <i>Age</i> | <i>Education</i> | <i>Occupation</i> | <i>Number of Children</i> | <i>Children's Ages</i> | <i>Marital Status</i> |
|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Andrea | 38 | High School Diploma | Quality Assurance Specialist | 1 | 17 | Single |
| Charlotte | 40 | High School Diploma | Engineering Technician | 1 | 1.5 | Single |
| Nicole | 52 | High School Diploma | Project Coordinator | 1 | 22 | Married |
| Stephanie | 58 | High School Diploma | Graphic Designer | 1 | 18 | Married |
| Hannah | 52 | Associate's | Recruiter | 2 | 19-21 | Divorced |
| Sarah | 52 | Associate's | Senior Care Provider | 1 | 8 | Married |
| Katherine | 52 | Bachelor's | Family Support Worker | 2 | 17-21 | Divorced |
| Nancy | 54 | Bachelor's | Wine Importer | 4 | 17-23 | Divorced |
| Sadie | 57 | Bachelor's | Mechanical Engineer | 3 | 19-22 | Divorced |
| Amanda | 53 | Master's | Research Coordinator | 3 | 17-21 | Divorced |
| Anne | 43 | Master's | Art Librarian | 1 | 3 | Married |
| Emma | 39 | Master's | Sexual Assault Program Coordinator | 2 | 1.5-4 | Married |
| Rebecca | 34 | Master's | Financial Analyst | 2 | 1.5-3 | Married |
| Eleanor | 37 | Doctor of Medicine | Breast Oncologist | 2 | 4-6 | Married |

CHAPTER THREE

Employed mothers do not want to “have it all”

Introduction

In this chapter I will explore trends indicated by the data and provide in depth analyses on three of my interviewees who clearly articulated their personal definition of having it all. Anne Marie Slaughter and Sheryl Sandberg’s commentary on “having it all” has inspired a formula of fulfillment for women that is not inclusive or realistic for many. My interviewees reveal common trends among employed mothers’ definitions of having it all, as well as some digressions from these trends. It is also important to consider that women who believe they do have it all are not necessarily satisfied with the balance of their work, family, and personal responsibilities. They may have pieces of everything they want, but the proportions are not to their liking. These findings complicate our understandings of what women want out of their lives and our potential solutions to the problems women face in achieving self-fulfillment.

The Influence of Slaughter and Sandberg

Anne Marie Slaughter’s article titled “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All” published in June of 2012 in *The Atlantic* sparked a media frenzy and national debate concerning the conditions employed women face in pursuing their professional and personal goals. In March of 2013 Sheryl Sandberg published her book, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*. Both Slaughter and Sandberg are highly successful in their fields and enjoy positions of power that few women achieve in their careers. Slaughter is the President and CEO of the New America Foundation as well as a professor of politics and international affairs at Princeton University (Princeton University 2013). Sandberg is COO of Facebook and a self-made billionaire (Mac 2014). They are also both married and have children. While the family structure these two women have is common for American women, the careers and resources available to them are

not at all representative of the general population of employed mothers. Yet, the analysis of work/life balance their respective publications provides as well as the advice to employed mothers that they espouse is considered universally applicable. This has become problematic because the aspirations these extraordinarily successful women have for themselves as career professionals and mothers do not align with what employed mothers from a broader spectrum of education and career backgrounds say they want, according to my data. Slaughter and Sandberg do acknowledge that the workplace is not designed for women, but if employers and policy makers want to mitigate this issue, Slaughter and Sandberg are not appropriate representatives for the average American woman.

Every woman conceives of “having it all” in a different way. No matter the particulars, having it all means being fulfilled in all aspects of one’s life. Sandberg and Slaughter’s definitions of having it all divide a woman’s life into two spheres, one being her professional life and the other being her family life. This division of women’s lives into two spheres simplifies and reduces a woman down to her functions in society and presumes that she can only find fulfillment in what she does for others, whether that be the work she does in the office or in the home. Furthermore, many women are not in a position to pursue their passions and turn them into careers, nor should they have to. It is unlikely that women working in very low-paying and physically or mentally taxing jobs want to seek a sense of accomplishment from their work. Sometimes a job just pays the bills. Additionally, the pressure on mothers to find fulfillment in parenting alienates those who, for whatever reason, do not. It should be perfectly acceptable for women to want to pursue something for herself and that does not need to be through procreation or participation in our capitalist system. Slaughter acknowledges that her idea of having it all “depend[s] almost entirely on what type of job [she has]” and on feeling that she is the kind of

parent to her children that she desires (2012:1). Similarly, in her chapter “The Myth of Doing It All,” Sandberg writes almost exclusively about managing the trajectory of her career and her mothering responsibilities (2013). What Sandberg does not consider is that women can also find fulfillment by pursuing personal interests through the combination of work, family, and personal pursuits.

Before this study I followed the debate on whether or not women in America can or do have it all, and was left with the distinct impression that having it all means wanting a high-powered career while also fulfilling traditional gender roles in the home. In this chapter I argue that employed mothers do not want to have high-powered careers while fulfilling traditional gender expectations in the home. My interviewees assert that employed mothers often want careers that are challenging, rewarding, and intellectually stimulating; the ability to share household responsibilities with a partner, children, or hired help; and time for themselves to explore interests outside of their career and home life. Only one of my interviewees shared that if she could financially afford to she would be a full-time stay at home mom, while a few discussed their desire to work part-time in order to have more time with their families. To presume that women do not know what they want, or that they all should want the same things in life fails to recognize the agency and personal will of individual women.

Overview of the Data

Out of the fourteen employed mothers that I interviewed, eight reported that they personally feel that they have it all in the way they define it. Of these eight, three have a high school diploma, two have an associate’s degree, two have a bachelor’s degree, and one has a master’s degree. Taking marital status into consideration, it is found that four are married, three are divorced, and one is single. This leaves six employed mothers reporting that they do not have

it all. One of these women has a high school diploma, one has a bachelor's degree, three have master's degrees, and one has a doctorate. In terms of marital status, one woman is single, two are divorced, and three are married. The nearly even split between the interviewees who think they have it all and those who do not cannot be explained by any single variable, but it appears that education level may matter. More women with lower levels of education, meaning a high school diploma or associate's degree, think that they have it all, while more women with at least a bachelor's degree think they do not have it all. Perhaps women with higher levels of education feel more pressure to live up to their potential and to utilize their degree to its fullest. Interestingly, marital status does not appear to influence whether or not employed mothers think they have it all.

Sarah on what makes a good mother

Sarah is fifty-two, married, and the mother to one daughter. She has her associate's degree and works as a senior care provider. Unlike the other interviewees highlighted in this chapter, Sarah's definition of having it all does not include a career. She does not seek personal fulfillment in her job and expects that if she was able to be a stay at home mom that she would be completely satisfied with her life. Being a mother is the most important responsibility that she believes has, a model of fulfillment that departs significantly from Slaughter and Sandberg's implicit prescriptions for successful womanhood.

Sarah became a parent later in life and had a career as a photographer at the time she learned she was pregnant. She made the decision to change careers completely in order to be with her daughter as much as possible. If she was experiencing any kind of discrimination or other issue at work, she explains that it would not be a problem for her to just change jobs. She seems to have little interest in the particular field she is in. "At this point, my child and my

family come first. So I don't care, really, about anything else.” While there are aspects of her job that she enjoys, there is little holding her there in terms of the people she works with or the fulfillment she finds in her work. The greater appeal of her job comes from the flexible schedule it allows her to have. She was not willing to put her daughter in daycare, “And I wasn’t gonna give my infant to somebody to take care of. I just couldn't. I couldn't do it. So I had – I knew I was gonna have to find something where I could work nights or odd hours so that my husband could be here to take her when I was at work.”

Sarah expressed a belief that none of the other interviewees have. She thinks that employed mothers are not as good mothers as stay-at-home moms. “I don't think that you can do both and say you have it all and be a good parent.” She expresses concern over not being a good parent and comments that she hopes to be there enough for her daughter so that she does not end up needing therapy later in life. It is not clear where this concern comes from, but it has certainly influenced her parenting philosophy and priorities when it comes to her career and family. As discussed in the literature review, Corrigan and Konrad’s find that women with more traditional attitudes towards gender spend more time fulfilling family and household responsibilities (2007:848). Sarah may have a more traditional outlook on gender and family dynamics that influences her thinking and behavior.

The rise in popularity of intensive mothering may also help explain Sarah’s beliefs. Afflerback and her colleagues explain that “the ideology of intensive mothering hold mothers independently responsible for childrearing and accountable for each and every facet of their children’s well-being, including protecting their children and families from potential harms caused by industrialization and modernization” (2013:389). Between 1975 and 2010 the amount of time mothers spend with their children has nearly doubled and is connected to the rise of

intensive mothering (Damaske 2013:436). Attachment parenting is an example of intensive mothering and involves baby carrying, breast feeding, and co-sleeping (Afflerback et al. 2013:388). With the exception of breastfeeding, none of the recommended child care practices must be fulfilled by a woman; however, intensive mothering is gendered (Hays 1996:x) and perpetuates ideas about women being naturally suited to care giving. Additionally, it is well established that children who attend high quality day care facilities are better off developmentally than children who stay home with a parent (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network 2002). Other interviewees, including Rebecca whose story is highlighted below, recognize the benefits their children receive from being in childcare where early childhood development professionals are employed. Today, many women, including many of my interviewees, need to work to support their families (Stoker and Bruenig 2013). The need to work in order to provide children with their most basic needs, including food, shelter, and clothing, combined with the societal pressure to always be physically and emotionally available to one's children leaves women in an impossible situation (Hays 1996). Sarah does need to work to help support her family, but she still maintains that she would be a better mother if she did not, which suggests that she internalizes the rhetoric surrounding intensive mothering.

Rebecca on trying to have it all on her own terms

Rebecca is a married thirty-four year old woman with two young sons under the age of four. She has a master's degree and has worked full-time as a business and financial analyst for over a decade. She is very driven and admits to being somewhat of a perfectionist. This was made clear when she repeatedly mentioned how she has been thinking about what questions I might ask and how she could best answer them in the days leading up to our interview. Her responses to my questions display a high level of self-awareness as she carefully considers how

her own actions and thoughts along with the social constructs in the workplace and at home influence her life.

Rebecca's job is demanding and her work is deadline driven which puts a strain on coworker relationships. She says, "Well [some]times it's tough because I don't know, with the project work that we have we have really heightened deadlines. Actually usually not totally realistic deadlines I should say. And so it's kinda tough 'cause you don't really have a lot of downtime. And usually any socializing is often like people going down to the cafeteria to grab coffee and come back up which the majority of the people on my project team do not eat lunch in the cafeteria." She keeps her relationships with her coworkers professional in part because there is no time to get to know them. It seems that this lack of a personal connection keeps her distanced from her work. Even though she says that she enjoys the work that she does, it is not an integral part of her identity to be working for her particular company in the business and financial sector.

It is clear that Rebecca takes pride in doing her job well and meeting her own expectations for herself. She received one the highest evaluations possible from her manager when she had a new baby at home. Interestingly, when going over the evaluation, her manager acknowledged for the first time that it must be difficult to be an employed mother and perform the way that Rebecca does. Although this had not previously been acknowledged, Rebecca suggests that her coworkers make assumptions about her ability to contribute extra time to projects. It is assumed that because she is a mother that she will not be able to stay late or come in on weekends, so she often is not even asked to do those things. She considers this both an advantage and a disadvantage in that she does not need to make the decision and face the

consequences of it, while on the other hand she is not given the opportunity to go above and beyond like her coworkers.

Having it all for Rebecca is different than the definition provided by Slaughter and Sandberg. She explains,

Truly my idea of having it all, not just for kids but including kids would be working on a part time basis and a job that I truly love in an industry that I find very passionate and that I have time devoted to that but also have the flexibility to spend time with my children. And then financially I wouldn't have to be as concerned about the number of hours having to work full time in order to get them in a financially secure situation. That would be my ideal – I would like to spend more time with them at home even if it was a day that I could go to work four days a week or something.

In addition to wanting to do work that she is passionate about with the flexibility to spend ample time with her children, she says that she does not want to fulfill the traditional role for women in the home. She shares household responsibilities with her husband, “We share a lot of responsibilities. Those that some people would consider you know sometimes more on the female side he helps out quite a bit.” Although both parents contribute equally, Rebecca admits that that she will put off household chores in order to spend more time with her kids.

As Rebecca says above, she would ideally work part-time, and while this is not what her current job allows for she does have a fair amount of flexibility. Her managers have allowed her to adjust her schedule so she can work from home for one day and an afternoon. She thinks that her record of producing good work contributed to her managers' decision to allow her to take on this schedule. “They know what I produce and they like it and so I get to like now I get to work from home most of the day on Tuesday so I can have Jackson, my second son home and Fridays I have the afternoon off to try to spend time with my kids. And I work the other hours late at night during the week Monday through Thursday and so I can kinda have a shifted schedule.” The structure of a 9:00 to 5:00 forty hours or more a week in an office does not work for parents who want quality time with their children.

Rebecca makes the interesting point that the most difficult thing for her about being an employed mother is that she does not have time to think about what she really wants to do career wise. “I’m still trying to find my true direction of where I wanna end up and having kids I spend less time doing that ‘cause if I’m not at work and getting my job done, I have very little time to reflect on where I wanna go and how I can get there and action plans to get there.” Without personal time, she is not able to contemplate the career moves that will allow her to reach her full potential and sense of career fulfillment. In some ways this is similar to the emphasis Slaughter and Sandberg place on promotions in that Rebecca wants to feel a sense of pride in the work that she does. On the other hand, she is more interested in the work being personally rewarding than impressive to others. If given the opportunity to have a high-level job, Rebecca says that she would not take it if it meant spending less time with her family.

Sandberg’s definition of “having of it all” fails to recognize that some employed women do not find fulfillment in promotions and fancy job titles, but are instead more interested in doing work that they find meaning and enjoyment in. Almost all of my interviewees said that they find satisfaction in their jobs when the work they are doing is challenging and engaging. Only three interviewees mentioned career advancement as something they desired, but even so, it was framed as something that they think would add to the challenge of their job and therefore be worthwhile. Rebecca adds an important point when she states that her responsibilities as an employee and a mother do not leave her enough time to really consider what kind of work she wants to devote her career to, or at least to what her next career move will be based on her current interests. Even if women appear to be managing their job and their family well in the present, they may not have the time to devote to seriously considering the trajectory of their career, which could ultimately mean that their career is less satisfying than it could have been.

When employed mothers like Rebecca, who are prized employees, do not reach their full potential, their employer suffers, which in turn negatively impacts society as a whole.

Approximately 60 million American mothers are employed and that many people potentially not contributing in the way that would most benefit them, their family, their company, and their community is disconcerting (US Census Bureau 2012).

Emma on setting her own priorities

Emma is a married thirty-nine year old mother of two young boys and is employed at a university sexual assault awareness and counseling center. She has her master's degree and is a self-declared feminist, which significantly influences how she perceives herself as a woman, wife, mother, and employee. She is self-motivated and finds great fulfillment in the work that she does, which involves programming, leadership responsibilities, and teaching. She does not think that women can have it all given the current structure of the workplace and gender expectations, but she likes to think that she has it all.

Emma's job is emotionally challenging, but she knows the work she is doing is important and helps others. Having supportive coworkers helps her deal with the stress of her job:

I mean, it's a great place to work. I have really good coworkers. I have really great colleagues and so on that I met on campus; I mean, I've been here 11 years. The students are fantastic. It's a wonderful place. You know yes I have worked with people in crisis, yes horrible things have happened to them, but for the most part they're incredibly resilient. Most of them are able to get back on their feet at some point. You know that's what we're here to do is try to keep them moving forward in their healing process.

She especially enjoys working with students because training them to be advocates for sexual assault survivors creates a more balanced experience. She currently holds her own position and is also serving as the interim director, a position that she hopes will become permanent. Taking on the director position would mean more responsibility and she has taken into consideration the fact that she has two young sons at home that she does not want to lose too much time with

because of a promotion. It is clear that she wants this new position because of the challenge it would provide and not because of the higher title. She says of her current job, “I think at the position I was at I was starting to get a little bit bored or it was kind of stagnant.”

Emma places great emphasis on the importance of her partnership with her husband in allowing them both to pursue their career interests and have the family life that they want. “I’m very fortunate. I have a very good partner in that so he manages most of our finances and partially because I don’t know – you know, that’s just what we’ve kind of gone into. We get a shared budget that we use [...] As far as cleaning, that’s up to all of us but we do hire a maid service that comes in every two weeks.” Emma is not concerned with meeting the expectations society has for her as a wife and mother in terms of household responsibilities. She and her husband have set priorities together. This was not an unusual approach among the married interviewees, but Emma repeatedly mentioned her equal partnership as being an integral part of her family dynamic and her efforts to create a balance between her work and family responsibilities that is satisfying.

A flexible work schedule has helped Emma create a balance, even though it is not her ideal balance. She currently works four days a week so she can be home with her kids one weekday in addition to weekends. Interestingly, Emma worked on a women’s commission at the university that worked to implement a flexible workplace initiative. Women employees at the university where she works are not treated the same way as men and the initiative sought to bring light to these issues and make sure that both men and women had the same opportunities for flexible schedules. “So one of the things we did is we lumped on as the workplace responsibilities of let’s look at this from a business model, so let’s look at if you can have people working from home so that you know there’s still some production but yet they’re able to be

home with their kids you know on those days.” She has personally benefitted from the work she did on this issue.

Emma spoke at length about the importance of personal time for her and the other roles she has in life. She is an individual outside of being a mother and a wife. “There are times where I’ll say, okay, today is my day, and my day may mean my family day. My day may mean I’m going to the gym by myself. My day may mean my kids are coming with me to the gym but they’re going to the daycare there.” In addition to alone time, she also discusses how she tries to make time for friends. Having a support group outside of work and family may mean that she needs to step in and help her friends out. She explains that prioritizing her friendships over her family does happen. Society may expect women to always put the needs of their family above anything else, but because Emma has been on the receiving end of support from friends she knows that is a part of her life worth investing time and energy into.

Emma sets her own priorities and does not let gender norms dictate how she lives her life as an employed mother. She and her husband make a conscious effort to share household and parenting responsibilities equally because it is fair, but also because Emma takes a strong feminist stance and believes that men and women are capable of performing the same tasks. Emma’s narrative supports Corrigall and Konrad’s argument that those with egalitarian beliefs live more egalitarian lives (2007:847). Boys and girls are socialized to perform specific roles in society. As discussed in the introduction, women’s roles are more limited than men’s because the division between the private and public sphere has been divided by gender. Emma recognizes that as an employed woman she contributes to the public sphere in the same way as her husband. When women began to enter the public sphere in greater numbers, men did not take on more responsibilities in the private sphere and as a result women have been overburdened by their

roles as mothers, homemakers, and employees. By equally sharing household and parenting responsibilities, as Emma and her husband do, women are able to decide how to prioritize their other roles that are in both the public and private spheres. Emma mentions times when she needs to prioritize being a friend and she may well also prioritize being a volunteer, mentor, or t-ball coach. When employed mothers set their own priorities they are doing what they consider to be best for themselves and asserting their own agency and individuality.

Discussion and Conclusion

Sandberg assumes that women will all be empowered by their careers, including employed mothers. In reality, Sandberg's perspective is limited to that of a highly educated, high-powered, and very well paid employed mother. Assuming that Sandberg has some kind of insight into what all women want out of life is harmful because women who do not fit that mold, whether for reasons within or out of their control, are not heard. The exclusion of women's voices that differ from Sandberg's results in the marginalization of a large segment of the population of employed mothers. When people are excluded from dominant narratives, their needs are not addressed and their opinions are invalidated. This is problematic on an individual and societal level. On a personal level, when an employed mother is excluded because of what she wants out of her life, there is a high potential that she will have a low sense of self worth and feel isolated from other employed mothers. On a societal level, not meeting the needs of a large segment of the population slows progress towards a more equitable world in which everyone has the opportunity to contribute to their families, communities, and the larger society in ways that they find meaningful. Excluding many employed mothers, who are already at a disadvantage because of their gender, makes starting a dialogue and understanding their perspective and their

needs impossible. It is difficult to consider the perspectives of many people, but listening to them will ultimately prove to be best for society as a whole.

This chapter has discussed how there are many ways employed mothers define having it all. All of their conceptions of having it all and what a work/life balance looks like depart sharply from the dominant narratives about what women want. Sarah would rather be a stay at home mother than have a career. Rebecca does express wanting to be empowered by her career, but asserts that her home and motherhood responsibilities do not leave her enough time to thoroughly contemplate her career trajectory. Emma emphasizes the importance of maintaining friendships that serve as her support system. The term “work/life balance” does not accurately capture the spheres of these women’s lives that they need to manage. The “life” portion commonly refers only to the home or family, which implies that women are only involved in these two spheres. As my interviewees, especially Emma, illustrate women are much more than employees, mothers, and wives. Their roles are varied and numerous, as are the ways in which they find fulfillment. The complexity of employed mother’s lives makes building communities of support important. It would serve women well to make conscious efforts to seek out other like-minded women with whom they can collectively support, encourage, and empower one another.

CHAPTER FOUR

Employed mothers know when they are being treated differently because of their gender

Introduction

In this chapter I will examine gender discrimination in the workplace and the extent to which my interviewees perceive it happening to them. I highlight three interviewees who explained in depth what discrimination against women looks like to them and how they have think it has impacted their career. Twelve out of fourteen of my interviewees report experiencing discrimination, but some more readily acknowledge it and brought it up without prompting while others needed to be asked about it directly before sharing their experiences. I argue that education level and past work experiences influence the extent to which women are aware of the discrimination they face in the workplace. Interviewees with lower levels of education tend to be less likely to report recent discrimination in the workplace than women with higher levels of education, but women of all levels of education are likely to discuss experiencing discrimination in the workplace in the past.

Awareness is important because it may lead to more reporting. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission received 93,72 filed charges in 2013, 27,687 or 29.5% of which were charges claiming an individual had experienced discrimination based on sex (EEOC). Gallup found that 15% of employed American women believe they have been passed over for a promotion based on their gender (Mendes 2013). The same respondents were asked if they believe they were not given a raise due to their gender and 13% replied “yes.” (Mendes 2013). These numbers from Gallup may seem low, but underreporting is all too common. None of my interviewees mentioned reporting any of the incidents of discrimination they have experienced and instead seem to try to deal with it on their own. Not all women experience

discrimination at work, but considering the many forms it comes in and the likelihood of underreporting, it is likely that most women experience it at some point in their careers.

Understanding Gender Discrimination

Discrimination in the workplace occurs on individual, institutional, and structural levels (Pincus 1996). *Individual level discrimination* occurs when one person behaves in a way that is intended to be harmful or threatening to those belonging to a different group. An individual purposefully excluding a female colleague from a meeting or project would be considered sex discrimination on an individual level. *Institutional discrimination* occurs when the policies of an institution are intended to limit or negatively impact individuals belonging to a particular group. An example of this as it pertains to sex discrimination would be having a policy that requires the most recent hire to be laid off should downsizing be required. As more women entered the workforce, policies like these meant that women were more likely to be laid off because men had been working longer. *Structural discrimination* occurs when policies of an institution are not intended to harm members of a particular group, but still do have a negative impact on them at work. Many women engage in careers that involve caretaking, including nursing and teaching, because they are socialized to engage in activities that allow them to hone these skills. Careers in education and health are the most common for women (U.S. Department of Labor 2011). These careers are lower paying and are systematically devalued because the work is considered unskilled and women are thought to be naturally adept at caretaking, which puts women at a disadvantage.

Discrimination against women can come in many forms in the workplace. These include policies and practices concerning the following: hiring, conditions of employment, firing, promotions, job classification, benefits, pay, sexual harassment, gender identity, and sex

stereotyping (equalrights.org 2013). There is strong evidence that women are discriminated against in the workplace in all above the aforementioned forms. One of the most commonly cited statistics used to illustrate sex discrimination in the workplace is that women earn 75 cents for every dollar a man earns (whitehouse.gov 2011). When race is considered, there are even greater discrepancies between women of color and men, the greatest of which is between Hispanic women and white men with the women earning 62 cents for every dollar a white man earns (whitehouse.gov 2011). Sexual harassment is also common. A poll conducted by Louis Harris and Associates in 2008 on employed women found that 31% had been sexually harassed at work by a man (AAUW). It was also found that 62% of those who reported being harassed did not inform anyone of the incident (AAUW). The exact reasons for their silence are unknown, but it is possible that the women feared that by reporting the problem they would face some consequences including being fired, receiving a poor evaluation, or even being ostracized by their colleagues.

The Equality vs. Difference Debate

Leaders of the women's movement have long vacillated over whether to argue for better treatment of women because women deserve to be treated the same as men because they could contribute just as well to society, or because women are different than men and offer society a unique set of skills (Scott 1988). This is referred to as the equality vs. difference debate. Joan Scott explains, "When equality and difference are paired dichotomously, they structure an impossible choice. If one opts for equality, one is forced to accept the notion that difference is antithetical to it. If one opts for difference, one admits that equality is unattainable" (Scott 1988). This debate has come up regarding hiring practices, promotion policies, and pay equity.

One of the most well known instances in which employed women joined together to legally fight discrimination in the workplace occurred between 1973 and 1988 when the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission brought a case against Sears. The EEOC claimed that Sears was not hiring women in the same proportion as men for commission sales positions, not promoting women at the same rate, and not paying women the same salary for the same work as men (Milkman 1986). The Sears lawyers called upon arguments in favor of difference and suggested that female employees wanted different opportunities in their jobs than men did (Scott 40:1988). The EEOC was unable to produce a female Sears employee to testify that she had personally experienced discrimination at work and therefore had to rely on the argument that patterns of decision making were discriminating against women (Scott 40:1988). The complex nature of the equality vs. difference debate ultimately caused the EEOC and female employees at Sears to lose the case and the debate continues today (Scott 42:1988).

It is likely that the discrimination that female Sears employees were experiencing could not be proven by a single woman because it was part of a larger infrastructure of discriminatory practices. The term “motherhood penalty” was coined by Michelle Budig and Paula England in 2001 and refers to the negative impact motherhood has on a woman’s career in regards to earnings, promotions, and evaluations (Budig and England 2001, Benard and Correll 2010). Employed mothers are more disadvantaged than employed women without children (Correll, Benard, Paik 2007:1297). For every child an employed mother has she will experience an average wage penalty of 5% (Budig and England 2001, Anderson, Binder, and Krause 2003). When an employee’s motherhood status is known to an evaluator, they are more likely to receive a lower competency rating than if it was not known that she is a mother (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick

2004). Most of the institutional and structural discrimination that my interviewees report experiencing are considered to be motherhood penalties.

Explanations for the motherhood penalty are robust and varied. Budig and England find that one-third of the wage penalty for mothers can be attributed to their job history, including experience, seniority, and part-time work (2001:219). A portion of the remaining wage penalty may be a result of employed mothers “being less productive in a given hour of paid work because they are more exhausted or distracted (Budig and England 2001:220). Stephen Benard and Shelley Correll propose that the motherhood penalty exists because mothers experience normative discrimination, which occurs when “employers discriminate against mother because employers believe, perhaps unconsciously, that success in the paid labor market [...] signals stereotypically masculine qualities such as assertiveness or dominance” (2010:617). They also argue that employed mothers who fulfill the normative qualities of a successful worker by displaying these masculine qualities are then judged harshly for not being as caring and warm as women are expected to be (Benard and Correll 2010:617). The Sears lawyers used the difference side of the debate as an excuse for motherhood penalties by suggesting that female employees did not want the same things as male employees. Employed mothers are left in an impossible position because they end up experiencing the motherhood penalty if they assert or subvert their feminine traits.

These explanations involve the equality vs. difference debate and illustrate Scott’s argument that this dichotomous pairing results in an “impossible choice” (43:1988). Budig and England’s findings show how employed mothers are disadvantaged by the choices they have had to make in order to manage their families and their careers in accordance with gender expectations. Employed mothers cannot achieve equal treatment in the workplace if they argue

that they have different experiences than men because these experiences are shown to leave them with fewer desirable workplace qualities. Benard and Correll find that even if women show that they are equal to men through their work performance, they are still thought of as different than men (2010). The equality vs. difference debate does not serve employed women or employed mothers well in combatting discrimination. The employed mothers whose narratives are highlighted below make statements that indicate which side of the debate they would identify with.

Overview of the Data

Out of the fourteen employed mothers that I interviewed, twelve mentioned experiencing discrimination based on their gender at some point in their career. It became obvious that some women emphasized discrimination they have experienced in the past, while others focused on the present or both the past and present. Twelve women mentioned being discriminated against based on their gender earlier in their careers. Many of them made statements asserting that discrimination used to be a bigger problem for them, but that the attitudes of their male colleagues have changed at least somewhat. Eight out of the fourteen employed mothers reported that they experience discrimination in their current jobs. Career satisfaction appears to be connected to experiencing discrimination. Ten employed mothers report being satisfied with where they are in their career and six out of these ten do not report experiencing discrimination in the past, present, or both. It is understandable that women who have not experienced, or do not think they have experienced, discrimination are more likely to be satisfied with their careers than those who have, or think they have, experienced discrimination. It is hugely problematic that the discrimination these employed mothers experience may be negatively impacting their career satisfaction because this suggests that the discrimination women experience is internalized and

ruining something that should be enjoyable. Level of education achieved also seems to be related to reporting discrimination. Two-thirds of the employed mothers with a high school diploma or associate's degree do not mention experiencing discrimination recently. Only one-fourth of the employed mothers with a bachelor's, master's, or doctorate fail to report experiencing any discrimination that has occurred recently. This suggests that women with higher levels of education may be more likely to perceive discriminatory practices and behaviors. Given the small sample size, it is impossible to draw any definitive conclusions regarding the likelihood that an employed mother's education impacts her perception of discrimination. It is imperative that all women be able to recognize when they are being discriminated against in order for it to be recognized as a social issue and addressed on a scale that matches the size of the problem.

Sadie on working in a male-dominated field

Sadie is a fifty-seven year old divorced mother of three children who are between the ages of twenty and twenty-two. She has a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering and currently works on quality assurance and project management for a government agency. She has always worked in male-dominated spaces and while it has been challenging at times, she enjoys the work that she does and would not give it up to be in a more female-friendly environment. Her children have always been her first priority and that meant that she did not have a very good balance when they were younger. Now that her children are in college she has more time for herself, which makes her feel that she does have everything she wants from her home and work life combination.

Sadie emphasizes the importance of having challenging work that keeps her job interesting. She says, "Like every day, there may be a different problem to solve. You interact with a lot of people on both the engineering side and the production side. So it is probably the

fact that each day, the job is different, or has the potential to be different.” She is interested in exploring new work opportunities and explains that she has changed jobs to be able to work in a different department or area, but she does not bring up promotions. This suggests that she is more focused on doing work that is interesting and expands her skill set than in prestigious titles. Her emphasis on the type of work that she is doing rather than on promotions may be an indicator that she feels she has some control over the kind of work she is doing, but less control over promotions. Moving horizontally in her career may be much easier to do than to move vertically and has therefore led to a focus on the breadth of work she can accomplish rather than job titles.

At the time of the interview, Sadie was working in a run down building while a new building was undergoing renovations. She describes the workspace as being in very poor condition. “We have no running water. We have no bathrooms. We have to go outside the building to a trailer to use the bathrooms. The building had no air conditioning, so they had put in temporary ventilation.” These working conditions caused some stress and frustration. Although the physical environment is less than desirable, Sadie describes having positive relationships with her coworkers. “I think I get along fine with them. I mean, some I don’t interact with at all. I have no need to interact with, but I’d say this is a new project that I just started, and everyone seems friendly.” She keeps her work relationships professional and explains that she does not often socialize with coworkers outside of the office. These statements seem to contradict ones that she makes at other points in the interview that clearly illustrate her discomfort with the behavior some of her colleagues exhibit.

Sadie estimates that her work environment is 95% male and 5% female. This extreme gender imbalance has led to some uncomfortable moments for Sadie. The language used by her

coworkers is often crude, “maybe every fourth word is a swear.” She says that she does not take the use of such language personally and has an interesting idea about how it impacts both male and female employees. “I suppose, if anything, if I’m there, I probably make them feel uncomfortable. So does that uncomfortable-ness get reflected back on me some way? It may.” On more than one occasion a male coworker will apologize for his language after noticing that Sadie is within earshot, so she feels that her presence makes male employees feel like they cannot go about their normal activities in the way they are accustomed. While this type of language is not necessarily discriminatory against women, it is telling that Sadie almost feels guilty for being in her work environment.

This guilty feeling comes up again when Sadie discusses how she avoids calling attention to herself as one of the few women and using that to her advantage. “I’m not one to like push my own – my, like, the fact that I’m a female and most everyone is a male. I mean, I don’t play that card, so I don’t feel like – if there was an advantage to use that, I don’t believe I’ve done that, but that’s not what I would want to do anyways.” Perhaps not playing the “woman card” is a mode of self-preservation or a sign of acceptance that in her workplace she is always going to be considered an outsider. This statement also seems to indicate that Sadie is more apt to agree with the equality side of the equality vs. difference debate because she clearly does not want to be treated differently because she is a woman. Sadie explains that she sometimes feels left out because she is a woman. Before a business trip the men in her office usually coordinate carpooling amongst each other and leave the women to form their own group. “So, if I was the only woman in the group, there were no other women, then I don’t know. I’d have to assume that I’d probably be getting there by myself. So the fact that we’re a little bit out of the loop, I feel like, not included in everything that’s going on, I think that’s based on our gender and not that

we're just not liked or something.” This behavior on the part of her male colleagues is likely not intentionally discriminatory, but the impact is the same. When women do not feel welcome in engaging with their coworkers and therefore building their network, they are at a disadvantage professionally.

Sadie's male-dominated work environment leaves her feeling like an outsider. This sentiment is common for women in the gender segregated workforce. Settles and her colleagues explain, “For individuals who are numerical minorities, as is often the case for women in male-dominated fields, workplace mistreatment may reinforce or create feelings of vulnerability, low status, and low power” (2012:181). It is understandably difficult to be the odd one out day in and day out at one's place of employment. Buse, Bilimoria, and Perelli conducted a study on female engineers and the reasons they stay in such a male-dominated profession. They found that “women persisted in engineering careers articulated high levels of self efficacy, described themselves in terms of their identity as an engineer, and were motivated by the challenges and novelty of the profession” (Buse, Bilimoria, Perelli 2013:139). Their findings fit well with Sadie's narrative and suggest that if a woman truly enjoys and identifies with their work they will put up with their minority status in the workplace. These findings reinforce the importance of making young women feel welcome in male-dominated fields early on in their careers so they will continue in these fields and eventually even out the gender proportions.

Andrea and awareness of discrimination

Andrea is a single thirty-eight year old mother, has a high school diploma, and works as a quality assurance specialist. She works in the same office as Sadie, but has had a different experience in terms of noticing discriminatory behavior against women in her work place. It is possible that she does not consider the same behavior that Sadie described as being

discriminatory to be offensive to her. Her career history may also shed some light on why her level of awareness of discriminatory behavior seems to be lower than Sadie's. In the past she has worked in factories and in service jobs before moving to her current desk job. The other work environments she was in were likely more casual and perhaps the kind of crude language that makes Sadie uncomfortable is normal for Andrea.

As a single mother, Andrea relies on her family in order to manage being an employed mother. She became a single mother at a young age and admits that this required her to put more time and effort into being able to pay her bills than into her education. Early in her career making money was more important than exploring jobs that she might make a career out of. "At that point I knew I could be making more money. It was always about doing better and trying to make more money." Her job prospects were also limited by the hours of the day care her son attended. She explains, "I couldn't take a flexible-schedule type thing. I had to have the hours that I could do day care. So I couldn't work at maybe [a grocery store], where I might have to work past 5:00 or 6:00." She does not think that being a mother was a disadvantage in her career, but being a single mother meant that she did have to take more time off than mothers with partners. Fortunately, she has always been afforded the flexibility she needs to be there for her son.

Andrea does not think that she fits the mold of a woman who wants to have it all because she has not followed a particular path, "I'm just saying they've laid out that path for themselves and so their support system is just maybe a little stronger." She considers her current life circumstances to be the result of her own decisions. She says, "I think it would have been very easy for me to say, 'I don't want to work. I'll just let everybody give it to me. I'll just be the mom.' But, necessarily, I chose to work, and most times struggle." It is interesting that she thinks that she could have gotten by without working and it is not clear who would have provided for

her, but she is likely referring to her family or the government. Her stance that she is in total control of her life informs her belief that women can have it all if they want to. She does not acknowledge that societal structures place certain groups in disadvantageous situations that limit social mobility. This sentiment places Andrea in a strange position in regards to the equality vs. difference. She is so convinced that women are just as capable as men that she doesn't recognize they are not treated equally and therefore probably wouldn't identify with either side of the debate.

She makes the statement that being a woman has not been a disadvantage to her in the workplace and instead her education was been a hindrance in her professional life. This may well be the case to an extent, but women with a high school diploma are paid less than men with the same level of education. Men with high school diplomas who work full time make approximately \$200 more weekly than women with high school diplomas who work full time (whitehouse.gov: 2011). Andrea does not seem to recognize the extent to which her gender is a disadvantage in the workplace and instead places more emphasis on her level of education. It is disconcerting that women may not realize that they are being discriminated against because this lack of awareness prevents them from being effective advocates for themselves.

Andrea's belief that her education is more likely to be holding her back than her gender also displays a lack of understanding of intersectionality. Girls and boys are socialized to have different aspirations, as are people of different race and class backgrounds. This was even more so the case when Andrea was growing up than it is for children today. In regards to gender, children internalize messages that tell girls that their career paths are more limited than boys'. This in turn impacts college attendance. "In 1970, there were only 68 women for every 100 men in college, but by the end of the 1970s, men and women were enrolling in equal numbers"

(Bobbitt-Zeher: 2010). In terms of race, “From 1976 to 2011, the percentage of Hispanic [college] students rose from 4 percent to 14 percent” (IES 2013). Educational attainment is linked to gender, race, class, and career outcomes. While Andrea recognizes that her level of education is a disadvantage to her career, she maintains that becoming a single mother at a young age was her choice and that she chose to provide for her son rather than continue her education. Andrea’s emphasis on personal choices seems to empower her, which is great but not always the case for individuals’ whose life circumstances result in situations that are out of their control. It is imperative that intersections like these are recognized by society and especially by those in marginalized groups who would benefit the most from any efforts made to curb the implementation of discriminatory practice and policies.

Katherine on working in a female-dominated field

Katherine is a fifty-two year old divorced mother with two children between the ages of seventeen and twenty-two. She works as a Family Support Worker and spends most of her time in the homes of children who have been institutionalized or at risk of being institutionalized. While she knows that the work she is doing is important, it can be difficult to work in the field of social services which she claims is largely disrespected. Her job makes having a satisfying work/life balance impossible. “Yeah, you know, these jobs aren’t family-friendly. Most of my work is before school and after school.” She considers these problems that she has with finding a balance to be “family issues” rather than gender issues. This perspective is likely informed by the work that she does with families as well as her background in social work, which requires her to have extensive knowledge of social systems. Furthermore, this perspective suggests that Katherine stands on the equality side of the equality vs. difference debate because she considers

balance issues to be problems that men and women alike have to deal with, regardless of their gender, indicating that men and women are capable of fulfilling the same roles in society.

Katherine has a varied job history, having explored numerous business ventures with her now ex-husband and then becoming involved in community health work and now social work. She explains what her current job entails, “I’m working in homes with families that have kids that have either been institutionalized or they’re in danger of being institutionalized, so just trying to help families figure out other ways of being together that hopefully are more successful.” She has little interaction with coworkers, which she considers to be a negative aspect of her job. Other disadvantages include the hours, pay, and lack of job security. Social work is a predominantly female profession with 82% of social workers being female and the work performed has been feminized and deemed inappropriate for men (Fischl 2013). As explained earlier, when women are thought to be naturally suited to a particular kind of work their contributions and the field are devalued. It is ironic that a field so highly populated by women is actually structured in a way that does not work for them.

While Katherine does not describe instances of discrimination that she has personally faced, she does explain her viewpoint on how workplace policies discriminate against women. When she was growing up she was under the impression that she could do anything she wanted with her life, despite that fact that she is a woman. She believed this until she started her family and began to struggle to fulfill her career goals and her responsibilities as a mother. “Everyone said, “Oh, you’re good to go,” which was great. I mean, we didn’t know any different, ‘cause things were changing when we were kids, but there wasn’t anything in place to actually help you do that, so the expectation was there that everyone would go out and figure this all out.”

Katherine is clearly well aware of the societal structures that inhibit women from achieving the same things as men and in her view, the best way to deal with this is to change policies.

Katherine believes improving work/life balance outcomes for women is not a priority in the United States. This is reflected in our workplace policies that do not allow for enough flexibility for parents, both mothers and fathers. She thinks that employers and policy makers could contribute greatly to improving the current situation families face in not having enough time, or time at particular moments, for all their responsibilities outside of work. She says,

I think that policy makers could set things up and offer – you know, just to get things rolling, even. And if there was a way to shift cultural norms. I think if employers sort of got on board, they'd find that it worked really well because when you have stress in your home life, it affects everything. People drop out of the work force and they don't give their best – they can't give their best effort. And if you create a family-friendly company, I think you're just going to get so much more.

Katherine is optimistic and does make valid points about the benefits that companies would get if they changed their policies.

Katherine's experience as a social worker provides her with a depth of understanding of societal systems of inequality and oppression that none of the other interviewees express.

Although she knows all too well that the work conditions and benefits in her field are dismal, especially for single mothers like herself, she sees the value in the work that she does and has stuck with it. Social work is one of the fastest growing fields with a projected growth of 19% between 2012 and 2022 (bls.gov 2014). Perhaps as the demand for social workers grows the work will be more highly valued. It is ironic that the very people who work to improve the lives of others by alleviating stress and its causes are themselves forced to comply with policies that make their lives more challenging to manage.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the extent to which employed mother perceive discriminatory behaviors and practices aimed at them based on their gender. Sadie, Andrea, and Katherine each perceive different amounts and types of discrimination against them in the workplace, which seems to be closely related to their past work experiences and the fields they have worked in and their education backgrounds including level and field of study. It is an indisputable fact that women experience discrimination in the workplace based on their gender. In the past, before policies were implemented to discourage it, discrimination against women in the workplace was obvious. Nearly all of my interviewees report experiencing discrimination at some point in their careers, with a few noting that there have been significant improvements. While this is likely the case, discrimination against women in the workplace still exists in ways that are perhaps more covert and systematic. Today, employed mothers are disadvantaged by the motherhood penalty more so than by direct and individual threats to their employment status in the form of sexual harassment and verbal degradation.

Discrimination against women in the workplace has wide ranging and complex implications for individual women, their families, and society as a whole. A startling 25% of households are single mother families (Mathur, Fu, Hansen 2013). Although more families rely on one income, it is becoming increasingly necessary for families to have two incomes in order to be financially stable. The number of dual income families increased by 31% from 1996 to 2006 with 59% of families having dual incomes in 2012 (Bianchi 2013). Single mother families earn only a fourth of what married mother families earn (Mathur, Fu, Hansen, 2013). This rise in single motherhood combined with the prevalence of the motherhood penalty and the rise of intensive mothering creates serious concerns.

All three of the interviewees highlighted in this chapter are single mothers with two being divorced and one having never married. Interestingly, single motherhood does not really impact the extent to which an employed mother experiences the motherhood penalty. Budig and England found that “children reduce women’s pay more if the mothers are married or divorced than if they are never-married” and that the motherhood penalties divorced and married mothers experience are very similar (2001:218, 221). This suggests that divorced mothers are not discriminated against more than married mothers, despite the stigma surrounding single motherhood. However, divorced mothers have greater responsibilities outside of the workplace than married mothers, even if they have joint custody. As discussed in Chapter Three, the rise of intensive mothering has placed significant pressure on mothers to be available to their children at all times and to take care of their every need. When children with divorced parents are staying with their mother there is no one else who can fill this role of constant caregiver. Considering intensive mothering alongside the motherhood penalty adds a new dimension to the inequality vs. difference debate. Single motherhood necessitates a mother’s increased involvement in her children’s lives while employed single mothers are arguably contributing to society the same way men are by being employed and more than men by mothering and managing a home. This suggests that arguments for women’s equal treatment must acknowledge both the ability women have to contribute to society in the same ways that men do and the additional responsibilities that mother, especially single mothers, have.

CHAPTER FIVE

Employed mothers strategically perform gender in the workplace

Introduction

In this chapter I will share the ways in which women consciously perform gender and analyze the motives behind their actions as they relate to their perceptions of themselves as employed women and mothers. My interviewees overwhelmingly claim that being a woman in the workplace is disadvantageous because they are perceived to be less capable and less invested in their work and careers by both male and female colleagues. This, of course, is not true. As explained in the previous chapter, my interviewees take pride in their work and are actually more interested in doing challenging work than in promotions. The women I interviewed are well aware of the perceptions their colleagues and society at large has of them as employed women and mothers and they do make efforts to undermine gender stereotypes. This can be in the form of both subverting and asserting their feminine characteristics. By consciously not fulfilling their colleagues' expectations of them based on their gender, some of my interviewees directly challenge the idea that feminine characteristics are innate. On the other hand, by playing up their feminine characteristics some of my interviewees challenge the notion that feminine characteristics are not valuable in the workplace. It is important to acknowledge that employed women and mothers are aware of perceptions their colleagues have of them due to their gender because to view them as passive and ignorant of the connection between their sex and their treatment denies them agency. They know part of the reason for the ways they are treated can be attributed to gender expectations and they act out these expectations in ways that benefit them. This is significant because they are actively separating femininity from womanhood and masculinity from manhood.

Conceptions of Gender Performance and Display

Erving Goffman's groundbreaking work on gender display provides what may now seem to be an intuitive explanation of what it means to display one's gender. He writes, "Gender expressions are by way of being a mere show; but a considerable amount of the substance of society is enrolled in the staging of it" (Goffman 1966:76). The staging of society in terms of gender results in specific spheres for men and women because an individual is seen as belonging to one group or the other. Goffman explains that gender is an "essential expression" that "can be conveyed fleetingly in any social situation and yet something that strikes at the most basic characterization of the individual" (1966:75). In this way, Goffman seems to suggest that individuals do not recognize their own gender display as a performance. My interviewees refute this claim by clearly articulating their awareness of their gender performances.

West and Zimmerman's article, "Doing Gender," (1987) proposed that gender is a social construct that is reinforced through our daily interactions. As mentioned in the literature review, they explain that doing gender involves an individual acting and presenting themselves in ways that others understand to be feminine or masculine (1987:127). The resulting binary between masculine traits and feminine traits suggests that responsibilities and roles, personality traits, and spaces are divided into those belonging to men and those belonging to women. Men are traditionally viewed as being assertive, strong, and meant to be in the public or working sphere. Women are considered to be weak, compassionate, and suited to a life in the home. West and Zimmerman's term "doing gender" differs significantly from Goffman's idea of "gender displays" because "the notion of gender as a display relegates it to the periphery of interaction. [West and Zimmerman] argue instead that participants in interaction organize their various and manifold activities to reflect or express gender, and they are disposed to perceive the behavior of

others in a similar light” (1987:127). West and Zimmerman grant individuals the agency and self-awareness that Goffman does not. This is significant because it points to the possibility of change and the eventual conscious deconstruction of gender expectations.

Overview of the Data

Six out of fourteen of my interviewees mentioned that being a woman in the workforce is a disadvantage. Six other interviewees believe that being a woman in the workplace has been both an advantage and a disadvantage. The disadvantages that women identified include being respected less, feeling left out, having a more difficult time advancing in their careers, and making less money. Only two consider being a woman to be an advantage in the workplace. The advantages reported primarily involved their perception that their colleagues or clients assuming that they were more suited for a particular role because of their feminine characteristics. A few of the women did express that they believe their feminine traits make them naturally suited to perform specific tasks in the workplace. These admissions do suggest that all women are not aware that gender is a social construct, but they are still aware that their gender performances, which can be both conscious and unconscious, are impacting their experiences in the workplace.

Nancy on the benefits of femininity in the workplace

Nancy is a wine importer and has a bachelor’s degree. She is fifty-four years old, divorced, and the mother of four children whose ages range from seventeen to twenty-three. The company she works for advises restaurants on their wine menus and makes purchases for them through vineyards all over the world. Nancy works full-time from home, but is often traveling around New England and the world servicing clients and distributors. She enjoys the work that she does and explains that it allows her to learn about a lot more than wine. “I get to meet really

interesting families all over the world, and I learn about their cultures and about their food and about their politics, because that's always a part of it.” She studied international relations in college and can apply her knowledge and interests in that field to her work, adding to the meaning and challenge of her career. Nancy describes being a woman in the workplace as both an advantage and a disadvantage.

While many might envy her ability to work from home, she explains that as a motivated worker it is difficult to stop for the day. “I don't think a week goes by that I'm not working 50 or 60 hours working out of my home, because I want to do a really good job and I really care about what I'm doing.” Her self-motivation as well as the enjoyment she gets out of her job comes in part from the fact that she is “doing something that pretty much brings joy into people’s lives.” There are challenges to her job that are amplified because she is a mother. It is expected that she go out multiple evenings a week with clients, but she was not able to do that and have her kids at home so as a result she believes she did not advance as quickly in her career as others. She sacrificed moving up in her career and traveling extensively in order to be the kind of parent she wanted to be to her children. However, she does not express regret over this choice.

As a divorced woman all of the household responsibilities are hers to take care of. The upside of working from home is that she can be with her kids when they need her to be. But combining the responsibilities of being a mom and a career professional was not always easy to manage. She tells this story about working and mothering when her kids were young, “I mean something difficult was trying to breastfeed and work at the same time. I shouldn't tell you this, but I used to pump while I was driving up and down [the highway].” While this may seem like a less than ideal situation, Nancy says that she is happy with the balance she has between her home and work life and that “you sort of do what you had to do.” She expresses that it would be nice to

have some help around the house and that she would hire someone if she could so that she could have a break. If she had more time to herself she would make friends more of a priority. “We try to do this big workday and try to do these kid things, and we have a family. So we don't have a lot of friends because we just – we had to cut something out. So a lot of times friends got cut out because you don't have time for that.” This statement is in line with the argument made in the Chapter Three that employed mothers want time for themselves outside of their families and their careers.

As mentioned earlier, Nancy reports that being a woman in the workplace is both an advantage and a disadvantage. It is a disadvantage because her field is primarily dominated by men and she has not always felt welcome in that space. She describes the difficulties she faced as a woman earlier in her career, “Maybe one percent of the people in the business were women. And so it's sometimes uncomfortable when you're the – and still, I have – two of my distributors have no women at all that work in sales. It's all men.” At this time in her career she made an effort to fit in with her male colleagues and saw being a woman as a “barrier.” Interestingly, when explaining the advantages to being a woman in her field she stops speaking in the past-tense. This suggests that either her perspective has changed since she started her career or her experience working with male colleagues has changed, or perhaps a combination of both explains the change. She says, “Well, I think that the public tends to like to hear a woman speak about wine in general, and about – they're more open to listening. Since women buy most of the wine [*talking while laughing*] it's a good audience. And I think a woman in sales to other women is [...] a benefit.” Nancy came to understand that because clients and coworkers perceive her in a gendered way, she may have an advantage in her field.

The social construction of gender places men and women in opposition to one another. Traits that women are thought to naturally exhibit are consistently contrasted with those that men exhibit. For example, while men are considered to be stoic, women are thought to be overly emotional. Many of Nancy's clients are women and can more easily relate to her than to her male colleagues. This suggests that women feel they can trust other women more easily. Another interviewee who is a breast oncologist expresses the same sentiment; her patients prefer a female doctor who can more personally relate to their experience. It is understandable that individuals are more likely to value the opinion of someone they consider to be similar to them and women can use this to their advantage as a selling point to potential employers and on the job in order to advance their career. On the other hand, West and Zimmerman assert doing gender "renders arrangements based on sex category accountable and natural, that is, legitimate ways of organizing social life. Differences between women and men that are created by this process can then be portrayed as fundamental and enduring dispositions" (1987:146). From this perspective, the tendency for individuals to prefer the opinion of someone of the same gender perpetuates gender expectations and the entire hierarchical system of gender. Nancy's narrative illustrates how employed women can benefit from playing up their feminine characteristics even in a workplace culture that generally does not value them.

Hannah on the benefits of acting like one of the guys

Hannah has an associate's degree and works in human resources as a recruiter. She is fifty-two years old, divorced, and has two teenage sons. She clearly takes pride in her work and has put a lot of effort into her career in order to find personal fulfillment and to provide for her sons. At one point in her career she decided that she wanted to work at a particular place and made it happen. "One morning when I was walking across the [private school] campus, I

thought, "You know I really want to work here. This is a great place. So I started my own little personal campaign to get myself in there, ended up getting a job there as a human resources generalist." Her tenacity has served her well in her career and has earned her respect from coworkers. When working in human resources for a waste company she sought out the opportunity to go on rounds and load the trucks so that she could better explain to potential hires what their job would be like.

She currently works from home and looks forward to the time she spends with her coworkers in the office. The problem solving aspect of her job, finding the right person for the job, is what she enjoys the most. Although she does really enjoy her job, it has been difficult to manage everything as a single mom. When her sons were young it was challenging to figure out a work schedule that allowed her to be home when her kids were home from school. Support from her family that lives nearby has been a huge help. "I was fortunate 'cause my mom was right there. And so I dropped them at mom's house and I was able to go up at lunch and spend lunch with my newborn." Now that her kids are older she is much more satisfied with the combination of her home and work life.

Hannah has found that being an employed woman and mother has disadvantages career-wise, including not being able to travel as easily as her coworkers. "When I was traveling to the other offices, my peers, the other managers, whether it was tech management, or whether it was the Red Cross, they would just stay wherever it was [...] Especially being a single mom and when your kids are still here, I didn't feel I could that." Single parenthood meant that she was solely responsible for being available when her kids needed her and that limited her options for staying late at work, going on business trips, and even having a typical forty hour a week schedule. Most of the women I interviewed shared that their work schedules made it more

difficult to fulfill their household and parenting responsibilities in the way they wanted. This problem is amplified for single parents.

Although being a mother meant that Hannah could not have the same schedule as all of her colleagues, she tries to minimize the possibility of being treated differently because she is a woman. She adapted to her male colleagues behavior in the workplace and accepts it in order to enjoy her job.

The guys didn't cut me much slack. You know I had to do something called boot camp, which is where they trained the drivers. [...] And so sitting behind a brand new hire who's dropped the F bomb, practically every minute, at first, really bothered me. And then I said, "Wait a minute. I need to get into their life at the moment. I can address some of that stuff later. I don't need to take it on right now.

Hannah's response to let this behavior slide was in part motivated by her knowledge that as a recruiter she would have influence over who was hired to work for the company in the future. She admits that she made a conscious effort to hire more women. "By the time I left two years later, it wasn't quite half-and-half, but it was probably 25 percent or 30 percent [female employees]. She purposefully adjusted her behavior so that her male colleagues would be friendly with her. This likely not only made her job easier, it also gained her the respect needed to make hiring decisions, which resulted in more female employees.

Hannah states that she let things go that she might not have if she had not been trying to be more like her male colleagues. This suggests that she views her natural response to their actions as connected to her feminine traits in contrast with their masculine traits. Another interviewee, Sadie, also expressed discomfort with the language her male colleagues used that was not necessarily sexist but certainly vulgar. I question whether their discomfort when the men they were working with were swearing was connected to their gender or more so to their class background. Both women were used to working in a professional office setting, while the men Hannah refers to were working as garbage collectors and the men Sadie discusses had previously

worked in manual labor intensive jobs. It is still important that Hannah believes that she was changing her behavior because of gender differences because her perception of her experience informs her future actions regarding gender in the workplace. She thinks that having an more equal number of women and men in the workplace improves the environment for everyone. This suggests that she believes the presence of women and the behaviors that they exhibit might influence men.

Amanda on getting the corner office

Amanda is a divorced mother of three children who are between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two. She is fifty-three years old. All of her children have considerable health issues, the most serious of which being her daughter's physical and mental disabilities that mean she requires a significant amount of attention. She has a master's degree and works as a research coordinator at a prestigious university. While there are aspects of her job that she enjoys, she explains that she took this job after being laid off from a much more lucrative one in order to keep her health insurance that her family relies on. "In my career, I think it's absolutely been a negative in terms of my ability to pursue opportunities, to make changes, and you know in what I'm doing to take the one time that I left [the university] in order to pursue a job that I really wanted, that was the one where I had to come back to [the university] because I needed to provide health benefits." Her difficult life circumstances factor significantly into decisions regarding her career.

Amanda provides an in-depth description of the hierarchy within her workplace. "So there are 15 women and five men, and all but one of the men has an office, and only one of the women has an office. So it's a very hierarchical good ol' boy atmosphere." Within this there are two groups of women, those who work primarily as receptionists and administrative staff, and

those who do research like she does. She gets along much better with the women who do work similar to her own because they have common interests. “We talk about, you know, the work that we do, but we also talk about politics or things that we’ve read or books; we recommend books.” She does not seem to have positive relationships with her male colleagues due to the aforementioned “good ‘ol boys club” attitude.

Clearly, Amanda is very perceptive and can analyze her surroundings and the social structures that exist with them. It is also evident that the gender hierarchy of her workplace bothers her a great deal. So it is no surprise that she purposefully acts in ways that disrupt that hierarchy and the gender expectations, which it is built upon. Amanda has noted the behaviors that differentiate the men from the women in her office and consciously chooses to copy what the men do and avoid what the women do. In this way she is defying gender expectations. She provides two compelling examples of this, which reveal interesting gender dynamics in the workplace.

Women are generally considered less professional than men, or at least less suited for the office. Amanda noticed that this was the case in her workplace and that it was due, in part, to the fact that the men never participate in casual Friday, while the majority of the women do. “They have casual Fridays where you can wear jeans. I mean you can’t be sloppy but you can wear jeans, and none of the men ever wear jeans, so and a lot of the women do [...] you are going to be identified or classified into a group based on whether you wear jeans or not.” The men keep up their professional appearance all week long and thus that is the only image their coworkers have of them. The women who dress casually are not viewed only as professionals. It is possible that this perpetuates the idea that men are more professional than women.

The second example Amanda provides is that she never brings baked goods to the office because her male colleagues never do. “The men don’t do anything. They don’t bring cookies. They don’t bring cupcakes. You know they don’t participate, although they do eat the cookies. You know it’s very clear that there are gender-associated behaviors.” Amanda perceives a direct correlation between how her coworkers perceive the women in her office and how the women display their gender. She says, “There’s a saying that says if you ever want the corner office, don’t bring cookies to work.” Baking is considered a female hobby and bringing cookies to work, or not bringing cookies to work in the case of men, is a way of performing one’s gender.

Amanda does not act in these ways because she wants to be one of the guys, but rather because she does not want her gender to impact the impressions her colleagues have of her. She expresses clear disdain for the gendered hierarchy within her workplace and does not want to contribute to the perpetuation of it by being seen as belonging with the group of men. By consciously avoiding participating in activities that her female colleagues engage in and therefore being more like her male colleagues she is attempting to neutralize any effect her gender is having on her colleagues’ perception of her. If all the men and women in her office participated in casual Friday and brought cookies to work, then she probably would too because it would not be a sign that she was somehow inferior as a woman.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how employed mothers strategically perform their gender in order to accomplish their own goals. Nancy, Hannah, and Amanda each present a different perspective on how their gender performance can influence their experience in the workplace, but they all share an understanding that their gender performance is something that impacts the

perceptions others have of them. Acker's argument that the workplace is gendered by design is undermined by the awareness these women have that their gender performances do have significance. Nancy is the only one who reported that being a woman is both an advantage and a disadvantage in the workplace, while Hannah and Amanda find it to only be a disadvantage. This undoubtedly contributes to how they construct their gender performances. Nancy plays up her feminine characteristics in some settings because she recognizes the advantages she has as a woman in her field when it comes to client relations. Hannah, on the other hand, avoids reacting to off-putting masculine characteristics that her colleagues exhibit when it is beneficial to do so because she knows that gaining trust and respect from male coworkers will help her in the long run to bring more women into the office. She also is willing to step out of her comfort zone and engage in work activities that are typically considered men's work. Amanda strategically manipulates her gender performance by analyzing the workplace culture, identifying the activities that are gendered, and consciously avoiding participating in practices that women engage in but that men do not. The individual and almost secretive way in which these women, particularly Hannah and Amanda, manage their gender performances suggests that they do not consider strategic gender performance to be a potential collective solution to mitigating the disadvantages women in the workplace experience.

These women are not going about their lives unaware of how their gender performance impacts the ways others perceive them. They are active agents and use gender as a "cultural toolkit," which Ann Swidler defines as "habits, skills, and styles from which people construct "strategies of action.'" (1986:273). This results in femininity being separated from women and masculinity being separated from men. Separating the physical body from characteristics and behaviors brings into question the gender binary that relegates women to certain positions and

role in society and men to others and instead allows for men and women to be seen as individuals with unique skills sets and personalities. This opens the door for what are considered feminine traits to be seen as skills that are honed over time and are not innate. Women can then be valued based on their merits and skills. Women like Nancy, Hannah, and Amanda who manipulate their gender performance may be seeing some results of their efforts, as Hannah does after gaining the respect of her male colleagues and subsequently hiring more women. Ultimately, though, they are not working to change the system as much as they are trying to work within it. A move towards collective action, where women come together and figure out how to neutralize gender in the workplace, could be extremely effective in combatting the gendered nature of the workplace.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

In April of 2014, President Obama signed an Executive Order that is intended to eliminate discrimination in the workplace, including discrimination against women. He also announced that the inaugural White House Summit on Working Families will take place in June of 2014 and will provide a space to discuss workplace policies and the impact they have on families (Ledbetter and Muñoz 2014). This summit is necessary because employed mothers have not collectively demanded changes to the system of workplace policies that disadvantages them.

Collective action has long been a tenet of feminist activism (Zucker 2004). It includes the creation of working groups and organizations that devise demands together in an effort to create positive change for women and society in general. One of the major critiques of Sheryl Sandberg's lean in philosophy is that it does not advocate for the creation of a collective movement (bell hooks 2013). Instead, she emphasizes the importance of individual action. This is not productive. The disadvantages women face in the workplace are so pervasive and systematic that individuals can do little to change the situation for themselves, let alone millions of people, on their own.

Intensive mothering provides an explanation as to why employed mothers are not demanding that attention be paid to an issue that negatively impacts them everyday. Intensive mothering places unreasonable demands on mothers to spend every moment outside of work tending to their children's needs. This parenting philosophy is framed as an individual choice for mothers to pursue, but it has become the expectation that a good mother will be at the beck and call of her children at all times. The societal pressure to live up to these expectations is felt, but not recognized as something that could and should not exist. Mothers today live in a historically unique moment (Damaske 2013). However, all the employed mothers I interviewed internalize

the intensive mothering construct to some extent and consider it normal. They largely consider the balancing act they perform as mothers and employees to be a personal issue and one that they need to deal with on their own. Employed mothers are not demanding that more attention be paid to the impossible bind they find themselves in because they believe they are responsible for living up to society's outrageous expectations.

Hopefully, this summit will bring together like-minded individuals who can work collectively to critically analyze the challenging situation families, especially employed mothers, face. Ideally, there will be a conversation about the standards which mothers are expected to uphold and the impact this has on their careers. Most importantly, I hope that employed mothers from a multitude of class, race, education, family structure, and career backgrounds are included in these discussions for their narratives will provide an accurate and comprehensive lens through which policy and collective action plans can be developed.

Findings and Implications

I have made three primary claims about employed mothers based on my interview data. The first is that employed mothers do not want to have it all. The second is that employed mothers know when they are being treated differently because of their gender. And lastly, employed mothers strategically perform their gender in the workplace. These findings help to illuminate some common misconceptions about women and employed mothers in particular that, when recognized, can provide a better perspective for understanding the steps that might be taken towards mitigating some of the challenges employed mothers face.

I. Chapter Three

My finding that employed mothers do not necessarily want to have it all, or do not want to have it all in the way that it is popularly defined, should prompt an examination of what employed mothers really do want out of their lives as women, mothers, employees, and individuals. The current language surrounding having it all and work/life balance is too limiting. The division of a woman's life into her work and her family does not allow for women to define what they want beyond the limitations of the public/private dichotomy. These limitations relegate women to a subordinate position in relation to men because they are not seen as whole individuals who have interests and aspiration beyond the workplace and home. It is imperative that employed mothers see themselves and are seen by others to be more than the sum of their parts because their contributions to society do extend beyond the workplace and the home and have the potential to extend every further if they are recognized as fully capable people and thus not marginalized.

II. Chapter Four

My finding that women are largely aware that they are being treated differently because of their gender contradicts much of the existing literature, which suggests that employed women are ignorant of the treatment they endure. The testimonies of my interviewees focus on discrimination at the individual level, including statements made directly to them by coworkers. This does suggest that women may be less aware of institutional and structural level discrimination, even though that kind of discrimination is arguably the most damaging to any employee's career. It is known that gender discrimination in the workplace is underreported and my interviewees suggest that many of the incidents they experienced were not met with any kind of resistance on their part or were dealt with on a personal level and not involving superiors. It is

important for women to understand that recognizing gender discrimination is only part of the solution and that in order for it to really end they need to tell someone about it. From my interviewees, it seems that most of the people making discriminatory comments or decisions are not doing it on purpose. No one can change their behavior without knowing it is a problem.

III. Chapter Five

As mentioned previously, when faced with discrimination in the workplace, women tend to deal with it on their own because the discourse surrounding employed motherhood emphasizes the individual woman's problems rather than framing the issue as societal. Even when they are not being directly discriminated against, women strategically perform their gender in ways that will be most beneficial to them. While there is some acknowledgement that feminine characteristics can be valuable in the workplace, for the most part my interviewees who alter their gender performance exaggerate masculine characteristics and/or downplay feminine characteristics. The problem with this is that white men are held to be the ideal that women should strive to be like in the workplace. However, there are plenty of problems with masculinity as it is expressed in the workplace including fueling an old boy's club mentality, competitiveness, and prioritizing work over personal life. A shift needs to take place in which characteristics are no longer attributed to a particular gender. Separating femininity from women and masculinity from men eliminates the possibility for assumptions to be made about one's temperament and abilities that lead to discrimination. This would help to neutralize gender in the workplace and employees would be viewed as individual people with a unique personality and set of skills.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

While I think my findings are important, there are limitations to my study. The limitations of my sample are discussed in the methods section and include the small size of the sample and the fact that all of the interviewees know me personally or know a family member of mine. My experience with interviewing was very limited at the start of this project and it is possible that this resulted in data that is not as thorough as it could be. My study could have benefitted from the addition of perspectives shared by women of color. All of my interviewees are white and while that may be preferable given the small size of my sample, the intersection of race and gender is hugely important to consider when examining this topic and I was able to only provide insights on one racial group.

Further research on employed mothers would help to enhance and extend my own study and findings. Listening to and engaging with employed mothers of varied educational, racial, religious, class, family structure, etc. backgrounds would add greatly to the depth of our understanding on what women want and why. It is crucial to better understand the aspirations employed mothers have for themselves if policies and practices are to effectively serve this population and society in general. The voices of the powerful do have value in that they are capable of reaching a wide audience, but the messages that they send should be informed by data and analysis that has a broad reach.

While I did have a mix of divorced, married, and single mothers, the factor of having a spouse or partner was not explored as fully as it could be. It was clear from my interviews that divorced and single women had a more difficult time balancing their personal and professional lives. Having any personal time was pretty much impossible for them, while their married counterparts at least have some opportunities to spend time alone or outside of their families. The number of divorced and single mothers is high in the United States and mothers are more likely

than fathers to have primary custody of their children (Grall 2013). These women have different and more complex needs than women with partners and research that looks into these in more depth would be useful.

It would also be worthwhile to examine how women's experiences and aspirations change over time along with the ages of their children. A few of my interviewees with young children said that they think balancing their lives will be easier once their children are in school full-time. Some of the interviewees with older children who have recently left home suggested that the challenges they faced changed over time as the needs of their children changed. The age of the mothers may be a factor to consider alongside the ages of their children, but the stages children go through in relation to their school schedules and other activities is likely to provide an important insight into the dynamic needs of employed mothers. Furthermore, generational differences could be observed between mothers with young children and older children in terms of what their expectations and aspirations are.

Concluding Thoughts

The aspirations that women have are largely informed by society's gender expectations. In the past several decades more and more women have sought roles outside of the home in professions and positions that were previously beyond their reach. While women today can theoretically pursue any career of their choosing, they face numerous roadblocks, and one of the most difficult to overcome is managing a career while also mothering. Societal pressure on women to do it all is arguably at an all time high. To make matters more complicated, the people defining what it means to do it all are women like Sheryl Sandberg and Anne Marie Slaughter who are not at all representative of the average employed mother.

Not all women share the same perspective or set of experiences. The idea of a global sisterhood is no longer considered appropriate, but there are systemically oppressive structures that impact women to a greater extent and it is still relevant to consider women to be a marginalized group. Employed mothers share many of the same struggles, but approach them in different ways and if anyone, including those attending the White House Summit in June 2014, is going to effectively challenge oppressive policies and practices they must understand these women's experiences and their reactions to them.

I chose to spend nearly a year researching and writing about employed mothers and their personal narratives because I thought it would be illuminating, empowering, and reassuring. It has been all of these things and as a young woman with many of the same aspirations as the women I interviewed, I am sure this thesis will continue to inform and inspire me in my personal and professional life. The findings elaborated upon in the previous chapters are applicable to some extent to millions of employed mothers and millions more young women like myself who are contemplating how they will juggle their personal and professional lives in the future.

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